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Conference Abstract

SwissCollNet - A National Initiative for Natural History Collections in Switzerland

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Abstract

More than 60 million specimens are housed in geological and biological collections in numerous museums and botanical gardens located all over Switzerland. They are of national and international origin. Taken together they form an entity with a high scientific value and international recognition for their contribution to scientific research. Due to the federalistic organisation of Switzerland, natural history collections are located and curated in numerous institutions. So far, no common strategy for digitisation, documentation and long-term data archiving has been developed.

This shortcoming has been widely identified by concerned parties. Under the lead of the Swiss Academy of Sciences, several organisations have assembled information about Swiss natural history collections. They identified measures to be taken to promote the scientific and educational potential of natural history collections in Switzerland (Beer et al. 2019).

With a national initiative, the Swiss Natural History Collections Network (SwissCollNet) aims to unite Swiss natural history collections under a common vision and with a common strategy. The goal is to promote the collections themselves and to harness the scientific and educational potential of these collections for research and training. SwissCollNet consists of representatives of research, teaching, museums and botanical gardens, the

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data centers for information on the national fauna and flora, the Swiss Systematics Society and the Swiss node of GBIF, the Global Biodiversity Information Facility.

The initiative aims to foster research on natural history collections. It will provide a single decentralised data infrastructure framework for Swiss research related to natural history. It will help to harmonise nationwide collection data management, digitisation and long-term data archiving. It will facilitate identification of specimens and revision of taxonomic groups. New research techniques, fast-evolving computer technologies and internet connectivity, create new opportunities for deciphering and using the wealth of information housed in Swiss and international collections.

The development of an agreed strategy and research priorities on a national scale will allow fluent, fluid and permanent collaboration across all Swiss natural history collections by promoting interoperability and unified access to collections as well as creating opportunities for scientific collaboration and innovation. This national approach will create an internationally compatible research data infrastructure, while respecting and integrating regional and decentralized conditions and requirements. Thus, it will maximize the impact for science, policy and society.

Keywords

digitisation, strategy, standards, data management, educational potential, scientific potential

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